Captain Woodcock.

(Continued from page 2.)

"The Forest Drummer!" cried the children excitedly. And it was.

Thump-thump-thump-pump-pump-bump-bump-ump-ump-mp! came the long roll beaten by the unseen drummer, always beginning in stately, slow and solemn cadence and quickening to a fast double roll as it died away. And presently, outlined against a patch of pale yellow light, the children saw the Forest Drummer strutting across a log—a big, brown bird, big as a hen, with a crest on his head and a pretty brown-and-black ruff. They saw him march up and down the length of the log once or twice, then halt, stand erect, crest up and ruff spread, and, raising his short, heavy wings, bring them down with a resounding hollow thump—once, twice, faster, faster—until his wings seemed to be but misty shadows, so fast they vibrated, drumming the roll there in the dim forest light.

"How does that bird make such a loud drumming noise?" whispered Geraldine.

"He must strike his body with his wings; or perhaps he beats upon the log——"

"O Peter, I am sure he doesn't strike anything; it is just the sound he makes when his strong, thick wings come together over his back."

"Quhit! quhit! quhit!" came a soft, musical bird-call, and the children looked around very quickly.

"Who was it told us to quit?" asked Geraldine aloud.

"Quhit! quhit! quhit!" came the hushed call; and, to their amazement, the children saw the Forest Drummer marching noiselessly over the leaves toward them.

"Did you tell us to quit disputing?" asked Peter curiously.

"It was my sweetheart who told you to 'quhit!'" said the Forest Drummer, "and she is perfectly right, too. What's the use of two children disputing as to how I make my drumming sound, when even those wise and learned people who spend all their lives in studying about birds do not know how I do it!"

"How do you do it?" inquired Geraldine, smiling.

"Well, as a plain matter of fact," admitted the big bird, "I myself do not know exactly how I do it; sometimes I think it must be the sound of my wings striking the air; sometimes I feel quite convinced it is the noise my wings make hitting the drumming-log——"

"Drumming-log!"

"Certainly! Didn't you know that every Forest Drummer has his favorite log on which he drums? That log is called the 'drumming-log.'"

"Why do you drum—for the pleasure of making a noise?" asked Peter, curiously. "That is why I drum."

"I drum tunes to please my sweetheart," replied the bird, strutting about, ruff spread, crest erect. "You know how sweethearts are—all mad about the military. So I thought that a dash of military flavor would not hurt my chances with the ladies; and besides, there's the White Trumpeter-Swan, who joins in sometimes in early Spring. There's a good deal of a military tone to the woods in early Spring—what with me drumming away like mad, and the White Trumpeter tooting away up in the sky, and Captain Woodcock strutting up and down, chest thrust forward and wings clasped behind, and all the sentinel Blue Herons standing at 'Attention! Eyes front!'"

"I should like to see that!" exclaimed Peter, excited.

"Then come into the woods in early Spring. The White Trumpeter might not be here; he's a Westerner, but he passes sometimes. When you hear, far, far up in the blue sky a stirring and martial sound exactly like a blast from a French horn, you may be sure that the White Trumpeter is passing, and that I hear him and am drumming accompaniment, and that Captain Woodcock is strutting up and down the alder thicket, and all the heron sentries are standing at rigid attention down in the big Vlaie."

"Suppose you drum again, just to please your sweetheart," suggested Geraldine, softly.

"She won't come," said the Forest Drummer, discontentedly; "she hears me quite plainly, too. She's dusting."

"Dusting!—with a duster?" exclaimed Geraldine. "Oh, how sweet, to think of a little partridge going about dusting her nest with a duster!"

"She isn't dusting her nest; she's dusting herself, without any duster at all," explained the Forest Drummer. "And, by the way, Geraldine, don't call us partridges. We are grouse—Ruffed Grouse."

"Ruffed Grouse," repeated the children, obediently. And after a moment Geraldine said: "Please explain how your sweetheart dusts without a duster."

"Why, she takes a dust-bath; that's all. Haven't you ever seen those little round wallows on the sunny edges of the woods, sometimes in the sand, sometimes in the powdery part of a decayed log? Look closer next time, and you'll discover tiny bits of down, and here and there a mottled feather in those little cup-shaped hollows; and when you do, you may be sure that a Ruffed Grouse has been dusting there."

"I do wish you would tell us the story of your life," said Peter, wistfully.

The Forest Drummer ruffled his beautiful brown and mottled feathers thoughtfully; then began:

"What with drumming and making love and keeping clear of foxes and weasels and raccoons and hawks and owls; what with dodging prowling cats, and avoiding skunks, and leading hunting dogs a wild-grouse chase, and fooling men with guns, my life has been full of fun—the very funniest kind of fun."

"Do you call all these dreadful escapes fun?" asked Geraldine, pityingly.

"Fun? I should say so! Why, it's more fun than a barrel of donkeys!" cried the Forest Drummer.

"But suppose they—the guns—should shoot you?"

"Aha! that's my lookout! If they get me they'll get something worth a king's dinner. Why, children, there is not in all North America such a tender and exquisite morsel as a slice of beech-nut-fed grouse!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" sighed Geraldine. "I don't see how you and Captain Woodcock can talk about your own flavors!"

"Don't mention us in the same breath!" said the big Grouse, peevishly. "His meat is dark; mine is white. Besides, he's scarcely enough for a mouthful, while I am handed round in generous, fragrant slices." And the big bird strutted up and down, tail spread like a fan, wings a-quiver, trailing over the brown leaves.

"Will you please begin the interesting history of your life and adventures?" asked Peter, respectfully.

"Life," said the Ruffed Grouse, "is a curious mixture of drumming and flirtation and delightful escapes. Life is full of pleasures and beech-nuts and apple-buds; it is also full of dogs and guns and No. 7 chilled shot. Sometimes life is also full of tail-feathers, if you don't dodge quickly enough."

The beautiful bird scratched his cheek with his toes, meditatively.

"I was born, with eleven brothers and sisters, in a nest on the ground under an old brier-grown stump, about half a mile from here," continued the Ruffed Grouse. "We were tiny, downy chicks, running all over the dead leaves, following the cluck! cluck! of our mother, scratching for ants' eggs, catching little beetles and moths and worms, picking up seeds and drinking the dew from blackberry leaves at sunrise.

"I remember very well my first scare. Mother heard something moving in the ferns, one afternoon, and clucked us to her. The next moment a small puppy came bouncing into the underbrush, scaring us horribly, and we scattered, running in every direction. But mother bristled up and flew right at the puppy, and gave him a whack with her wings, and the frightened dog rushed away yelping. Then a boy came running up, and tried to catch me, but mother flew at him and he jumped back.

"Then mother began to whimper and run about over the leaves, trailing one wing as though it were broken and she couldn't fly, and the boy called out to another boy: 'She can't fly! Catch her!' So those two boys ran after mother, who kept ahead just far enough to lead them on; and when we children were safely hidden under leaf and fern, mother suddenly spread her wings and flew up with a thundering whir! And I do wish you could have seen the astonishment on the faces of those two boys!"

"Oh, I am so thankful that they didn't catch you!" exclaimed Geraldine, her clasped fingers tightening in excitement.

"No fear of that," said the Grouse, with a wink. "There isn't a creature in all Forest Land that has as many tricks as we have. You ought to see your father trail me, for example.

"He comes into the beech-woods, gun poised, his white setter dogs leading. I sometimes sit up on the crotch of a white pine-tree and watch him. But if I've been on the ground, dusting, or dining on beech-nuts, or pecking at apples along the edges of the overgrown and abandoned orchards, the dogs catch the scent if the ground is not too dry or there is not too much wind; and then I must use all my wits.

"Oh, the chase I lead those dogs, winding in and out of thickets, over logs, across swamps and mossy glades, through hedge-fences, over the glistening carpet of pine-needles! Sometimes I delay too long, and the dogs corner me. I'm not afraid of them; they always halt, one foot lifted, tail rigid, nose pointed directly at me. They don't attempt to spring on me like a fox."

"What do you do when you're cornered?" urged Peter, breathlessly.

"I stand silent, alert, listening. Then I hear your father say in a low voice to his dogs, 'Ho! steady, there!' and I hear him walking noiselessly up straight toward me. I listen; I hear him give three short, low whistles—a signal to your uncle that the dogs are pointing. I hear your uncle, who has taken station outside the thicket's edge, give a whistle like a phœbe-bird—as though I didn't know that all phœbe-birds had gone South before the grouse season began!"

The bird ruffled up disdainfully, and went on:

"So there they are, all fixed, the white setters like two dogs sculptured out of white and blue-veined marble, your uncle ready outside the thicket, your father walking forward, gun raised, eyes alert. Aha! With a thunderous roar of wings I whir up, keeping a huge tree between your father and myself.

"'Mark!' cries your father, for he has not seen a feather of me!

"'Nothing this way!' cries your uncle.

"'Fooled us again! It's that same old Drummer,' says your father, laughing, as I rocket up over the white pines, out of range, and go sailing down the ravine as though I were going to alight there. But I don't," added the Forest Drummer, slyly; "I sail close to the ground, turn to the right, soar up over the other bank, sail down into the valley, then swoop through the densest and duskiest hemlock swamp in the county, and alight in a pine-tree so thick that nobody could see me if they knew I was there. That," added the bird, "is the sort of thing an old Forest Drummer does—if he can only escape the foxes and hawks, and the storms of Nos. 6 or 7 chilled shot which fill the first season of his existence as a full-grown bird."

All the while he was talking the Forest Drummer kept looking uneasily around him; and now he mounted a log and stood up on it, craning his neck and glancing about, but talking all the while.

"No. 7 chilled shot is what I dread—that, and a thaw and sudden freeze in Winter. But as for foxes, I'm too old a bird to be caught napping by any musty, dusty, grinny-jaws of a fox——"

There came a thundering roar of wings, a rush, and the Forest Drummer was gone.

Note.—The next story in the "Voices of the Woods" series by Mr. Chambers is entitled "Molly Mole" and will be published April 27th.

RIVER RATS AHEAD!

By Dan Beard

[In this story of the boys of other days, Mr. Beard continues the narrative of the origin of The Boy Scouts of America.]

AFTER the canoe had passed the suspension bridge, Tom spied Harry, or Hi, as they called him, and gave him the secret signal. Hi returned with signal of "Caution, danger ahead," so the canoe was turned bow upstream and paddled up to the log raft near the sawmill; there the boys were joined by Hi and they bivouacked in Grosbeck's woods, for Red and his gang were swimming farther down stream.

Hi had a bottle of strained honey and some bantam eggs. Tom had a stick of India ink and some needles, and Dick had nothing but himself. The three boys were sitting under some sycamore trees on the dry, cracked mud silt left by the woods on the banks of the river.

The River Rats, headed by Red, Sheepy and Blink, made the river bank, further down, too dangerous for these boys, and so they had penetrated further into the woods in search of a secure rendezvous and were now met in secret council.

Hi suggested that they form themselves into a band of guerillas and bushwhackers; Tom said the only people they could bushwhack were the River Rats, and the River Rats would be sure to lick the bushwhackers every time they met. To which Harry replied, "I don't see that that would make much difference. They lick us every time they meet us, anyhow. I don't see what those kind of fellows were made for, anyhow."

"Well, they're not much good," Dick agreed: "just the same, when I was putting on my skates last Winter, Billy Goosegrease's gang stole near and surrounded me, and I just had made up my mind to lose my skates and get a good beating, when I heard the yell of the River Rats, and you just had ought to have seen Red wade in on those fellers!"

"I tell you what, fellers," cried Tom: "I have been reading that 'Ancient Mariner,' and I think that it is a bully poem; you know he didn't believe in hurting people all the time and hurting things; leastwise, the fellow that wrote that poem didn't, because he ended up with saying:

> He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small,
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

"Oh, you needn't talk," said Dick; "I saw you run three fish hooks in Red's hand. Gee, but he will do you up when he catches you! But what's that Ancient Mariner Scout business?"

"Why, just three of us fellows, and we'll form a secret society and we all three will tattoo '3 A. M. S.' on our arms, and then we'll take an oath to stand by each other through thick and thin, and fix it with a swallow of strained honey."

"Fix what?" cried Dick, "the tattoo?"

"Shucks, no; the oath."

"Well, how's the strained honey goin' to fix it?" asked Harry.

"Why, this way; you know there's lots of cholera in the town, lots of people dyin'; I saw the coffins piled up higher than the second-story window at the undertaker's, and it's awful dangerous to drink strained honey in cholera time, and when you take a secret society oath you have to do something mighty dangerous; mostly you sign it with your blood, but any baby can do that because that isn't as dangerous as it looks. But when you drink strained honey in cholera time you got to be brave."

"You didn't bring any bread with it, did you?"

"No, but I brought some bantam eggs, and we'll roll these in mud and cook them like it says to in the book."

Tom went down the bank where the mud was still soft on the shore, and with a stick he traced a circle in the clay. Inside the circle he marked the mystic symbol, 3 A. M. S.; then all three boys kneeled around the circle, each of them crossing the index and second fingers of their left hands and solemnly saying "muggins" before taking a swallow of the insipidly sweet honey.

They then took the fearful and dire oath with much solemnity and spent a good half hour tattooing their arms with "3 A. M. S." They did this by pricking their arms with a needle and then rubbing the India ink into the pricks. It hurt them a great deal worse than being vaccinated, but none of the three whimpered.